

Concertino for Trombone in E-flat Major, Opus 4
Ferdinand David (1810-1873)

Scored for: two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani and strings.

Never look at the trombones. It only encourages them. –Richard Strauss

Despite comments like this by Strauss and other less-than-encouraging anecdotes about the uses for a trombone, composers have continually employed this exceptionally versatile member of the brass family since the mid fifteenth century. The trombone tends to be associated with profound sound generation, and not without cause, as many composers have used the instrument as if loudness is its primary attribute. However, when thoughtfully considered by the composer and skillfully played by the performer, the character of the trombone, in the words of Berlioz, could span the range of expression from “religious accent, calm and imposing . . . to the wild clamors of a drunken revelry.”

Ferdinand David (1810-1873 and pronounced da-VEED) was one of the first romantic composers to write idiomatically for the trombone, exploring various aspects of the instrument's character in a concerto format. (Other compositions include symphonies, five violin concerti, an opera and numerous chamber works.) David was a German virtuoso violinist and composer, whose name is inextricably linked with that of his more famous musical friend, Felix Mendelssohn. David and Mendelssohn met in Leipzig where David served as concert master of the Gewandhaus Orchestra and later as professor of violin at the Leipziger Konservatorium. Mendelssohn clearly had great respect for the violin playing of David as he consulted frequently with the virtuoso during the composition of his *Violin Concerto in E Minor*. David also gave the premier of the concerto with Mendelssohn conducting. The young David had also impressed Mendelssohn with his compositions, for it was at Mendelssohn's request that David penned the *Concertino for Trombone* according to the following story:

In 1817, the 17-year-old trombonist Carl Traugott Queisser arrived in Leipzig to join the local orchestra. Three years later he became a member of the renowned Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, a position he held from 1820 until 1843. During his tenure with the Gewandhaus, Queisser appeared as a soloist no fewer than 27 times, and was renowned throughout Germany, often sharing the stage with virtuosos such as Liszt and Paganini. When Mendelssohn became chief conductor of the Gewandhaus Orchestra in 1835, he was impressed by Queisser's abilities and promised to write a concerto for him. Unfortunately, Mendelssohn never had the opportunity to fulfill that promise. However, Mendelssohn did recommend to his new Gewandhaus Orchestra concertmaster, a certain Ferdinand David, that perhaps he should take on the project. The *Concertino for Trombone* was completed and premiered by Queisser in 1837, and was a great success in Germany and abroad. To this day it is considered to be one of David's finest works and is, without a doubt, one of the cornerstones of the trombone repertory.

The *Concertino for Trombone* is filled with the finest elements of the German Romantic period, combining rhythmical motifs characteristic of Beethoven with the lyricism of Mendelssohn. Skillfully interwoven into the composition is music that enables the trombonist to portray a broad range of expressive styles, from pure brassy bravado to soft, lyrical singing. From the outset, the first movement displays the giant expressive range of the trombone, alternating from flashy technical passages to sweet lyrical phrases. A short, operatic recitative brings the movement to a close, leading without pause into the second movement, subtitled funeral march. In the words of one commentator, “the soloist [in the second movement] seems to be playing the part of the

eulogist, contrasting deep despair with fond remembrances.” The third movement, also begun without a pause between it and the previous movement, recalls material presented in the first movement, coupled with further development. A flashy, triumphant coda brings the work to a close.